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## THE SOURCES OF SPENSER'S "MOTHER HUBBERD'S TALE."

THE conventional statements about the "Mother Hubbard's Tale" are that it is a revision in about 1590 of a poem first written about 1578-79; that it is written in imitation of Chaucer; and that it reflects the bitter experiences of its author while at court. In the matter of the date, most editors adopt the conclusions of Grosart.<sup>1</sup> As to Spenser's imitation of Chaucer, the usual assumption is that the *Canterbury Tales* supplied the model, and that the poet was trying his hand on the beast fable, somewhat after the model of the "Nonne Preestes Tale." Professor Lounsbury, however, thinks that there is no justification for this view.<sup>2</sup> "The custom of imputing to beasts the thought and actions of men," he says, "is too ancient and too general to be regarded as the exclusive property of any one author." Mr. Lounsbury goes on to say that the extent of Spenser's indebtedness to Chaucer is to be found in the irregular meter; there is no "imitation of Chaucer's matter, or even of his manner."

Apart from this theory of Chaucerian imitation, which in Mr. Lounsbury's opinion at least has narrowed itself down to a question of meter, and the theory that the poem is in part a vigorous expression of its author's view of life at Elizabeth's court, but one important suggestion as to a possible source has been made. In his edition of Spenser's complete works, Mr. Grosart has advanced the theory that in *The Morall Philosophie of Doni, englished out of Italian by Thomas North*, a work published in London in 1570, we have the source of "Mother Hubbard's Tale."<sup>3</sup> It is the purpose of the present article to show, if possible, that this theory is untenable, and to propose another source for the poem.

<sup>1</sup> *Complete Works of Spenser*, Vol. I, pp. 82-89; 178, 179.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies in Chaucer*, Vol. III, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 440-42.

## I.

North's translation of Doni was first licensed near the end of 1569, and was illustrated with woodcuts imitated from the Italian.<sup>1</sup> Doni's book, *La Moral Filosofia*, was first printed in 1552, and several later editions appeared. This was not the first Italian version of the fables of Bidpai, or Pilpay, for in 1548 a translation by Firenzuola was published, and this passed through three editions in Italy, besides being translated into French. So far as is known, North's translation was the only English version of the fables accessible to Spenser, though, in view of the great popularity of Bidpai, he may have come across some version in Italian or in French. That North's version was his source, Grosart maintains for the following reasons:

1. This was the great fable-book of the time.
2. Things are put exactly as in "Mother Hubbard's Tale," in sarcastic exposure of the doings at court and elsewhere.
3. The Foxe, Ape, and Moyle (mule) of Spenser have traits taken from Doni.
4. This book is used by Spenser in the "Shepherds Calendar" and in the "Visions of the World's Vanity."
5. The Mule's advice on how to thrive at court may be compared with a passage in Doni in which the Mule says that he will go to court, proposing to use arts and subtlety.

I must use everie one with arte, feeding still their humour; to deal in other matters with deceite, and in mine owne to have a subtile witte, devising still all I may to be chiefe about the Prince. . . . In Prince's courts, he that proceedeth not stoutly in his mattere, besides that like he is thought a coward, they take him for a foole.

6. In Doni, the Herdsman renders a false account of his herd.
7. We have in Doni, as in Spenser's poem, "passionate words of suitor's delays."
8. Grosart concludes that the personifications, the prosopopeia, etc., are from this book.

Before considering these arguments in detail, it will be necessary to give some account of those parts of North's translation which might conceivably have influenced Spenser. The

<sup>1</sup>Of the first edition but one copy is known to exist, the Bodleian copy. The work was reprinted by Joseph Jacobs in 1888.

opening stories are of the *exemplum* type, are not in any way related to each other, and are not animal tales. The latter part of the book, a version of Bidpai's *Fables*, is preceded by an introduction of its own, this being found only in the Italian. This introduction relates how a herdsman by accident wounds a valuable Bull belonging to the herd over which he watched. The wounded animal wanders near the court of the Lion, who is king of beasts. His curiosity and alarm being excited by the roaring of the Bull, the king sends the Boar to investigate. The messenger soon returns, panic-stricken, and the Lion, who seems a cowardly fellow enough, is also frightened out of his wits. Observing their master's fear, two of his court, the Ass and the Mule, plot against him. The She-ass remonstrates with them, and, to illustrate her point, tells of the ape who meddles with matters not concerning him. This ape-story is not similar to anything in "Mother Hubbard's Tale" (H), but is found in *Æsop* and in Bidpai. The Ass is persuaded, but the Mule is determined to persevere in his plot against the Lion. The She-ass continues to warn him, by means of the story of the wolf who promised a shepherd not to harm his flock if mercy were shown him, but who afterward broke his promise and was slain. All appeals are in vain, and finally the adviser seeks only to give wise counsel to the headstrong Mule. Here follow what Mr. Grosart calls the "passionate words of suitor's delays." The Mule goes to the Lion, and his proffered services are accepted. After a long speech by the Lion, the Mule relates the folly of the turkey who wished not to seem a prisoner. He goes on to say that he is sorry not to see the Lion hunting and offers to free him from dread. During the conference the Bull bellows outside, and the Lion is terrified. After an exchanging of other stories in no way related either to the plot or to H, the Mule goes out to interview the Bull. Much is made of the terror of the Lion when alone, and he is greatly relieved when his new friend returns with the assurance that the Bull is a fine fellow and seeks service. Thus the two are brought together; the Mule is rewarded with high office. In the following book the Mule lies to the Lion about the Bull; after several stories have been told to illustrate

the point, the king is convinced ; but in the meantime the crafty Mule has poisoned the mind of the Bull against his lord. At last the two meet, and a great fight takes place, with the result that the Bull is slain. The Ass again appears and remonstrates with the Mule, telling many stories to prove that in the end sorrow will come to him. The next book, "shewing the ende of the treasons and miseries of the Courte of this Worlde," relates how the Lion repents his hastiness, grieves for the loss of his favorite, and turns in anger upon the Mule, who defends himself so well that for the time being the day of reckoning is averted. By a chance, however, the Leopard overhears a conversation between the Mule and the Ass, and reports to the king certain evidence of the Mule's plot. A great parliament is called ; the Mule is frightened, but defends himself boldly ; he is put in prison, where he is visited by the Ass, a Job's comforter. At the great trial the Fox indeed appears, but he is merely mentioned as one of those who voted that the plotter was deserving of death.

## II.

It has seemed necessary to give a somewhat full account of Doni's *Moral Philosophy* (D), because in this way the great differences between it and H are easily made apparent. It is obvious that in H Spenser was very far from following D as a model, because not only the incidents, but the characterization and the entire plan of the story, are widely different. For D, like the *Seven Wise Masters* and other cycles of the kind, is merely a collection of stories having little or no connection other than that afforded by an extremely loose framework. There is somewhat more of a story than the framework of the *Canterbury Tales* affords, but this story is by no means parallel to H, while H has none of the illustrative stories which form such an important part of D, of the *Seven Wise Masters*, and of other cycles of similar character.

Considering Grosart's arguments more in detail, we may note :

1. It is hardly accurate to say that D was "the great fable-book of the time." Only one English edition, the first, appeared in Spenser's time ; the second appeared in 1601.

2. The characterization in D is by no means the same as in H. The Lion is no true king of beasts; the Fox plays no part in the main story, though he figures in several of the illustrative tales, usually in some such manner as in *Æsop*. The Ape has no part in D; and the Mule and the Ass, both prominent in D, are not characterized with reference to their nature as animals.

3. Grosart makes much of the herdsman who renders a false account of his herd. In H, it will be remembered, the Ape and the Fox, during the year in which they have charge of the flock, destroy first the lambs and then the sheep. When summoned to account, they beg respite till the morrow, and during that night they seek fresh woods and pastures new. Thus they give no account whatever. In D, on the other hand, the herdsman is no villain. By accident a Heifer falls and breaks her neck; the herder flays the carcass and carelessly throws the hide over his shoulder. This enrages the Bull, who loved the Heifer, and he attacks the man. In self-defense the man wounds the animal, with the result that the Bull rushes off and cannot be found. In giving account to his master, the herdsman tells the truth about the Heifer, but says that the Bull ran away through grief. It is extremely difficult to see how this incident could have suggested to Spenser the idea of the false shepherd in H.

4. The "passionate words of suitor's delays" seem, at first sight, to afford a better parallel. Still, there is no satire in D, and thus the words are not "passionate" in any such sense as in H. As has already been stated, the Ass, seeing that the Mule is not to be dissuaded from going to court, advises him how to conduct himself.<sup>1</sup> He is warned of his duty to be true to his sovereign, and is told of the temptations that he will meet. In reference to his dealings with his king,

for no respect in the world . . . see thou deceive him not of a mite. I do advise thee also to be pacient. For these Lordes and States I tell thee for the most part are fantastically, and I marvell not at it at all; for indeede Princes matters and affaires doth so occupie and trouble their heades that God knoweth they are full of passions, and can you blame them? Therefore, sometimes, will they, nill they, they loove and hate againe.

<sup>1</sup> Ed. JACOBS, pp. 80 ff.

And when thou perswadest thyselfe (by reason of a fewe smyling lookes they haue ouerwhile giuen thee) that thou art in high fauour, then they seeme not to knowe thee. And thou muste also looke after recompence of thy seruice, though unhappily thou hast perhaps bestowed fife and twentie yeares time, and thy youth withall, and yet notwithstanding hast not beene the better a rush for al this: and another in foure daies is made riche. For thus thou shouldest but wrappe thyselfe in care to thy undoinge, and yet the thing nothing remedied. . . . Therefore he that cannot beare it paciently lifteth up his head, and a flie lighteth on his nose, and byteth him with these and such lyke courtly graces, and so goeth his way; so he that loseth his time and yeres. Pacience therefore that oft goeth to sleepe with Hope, bringeth thee at least to suche ende as thou art to ware of, and some time it carieth meate in mouth and getteth thee somewhat. . . . Thou must feare the enuie of Courtiers, for they will make thee stumble and laye thee flat on the ground upon thy nose. And the more thou growest in fauour with thy Maister, and that he giueth thee, and make thee fatte in purse; so much more take thou heede to thyselfe, and looke about thee.

5. In D the Mule takes no disguises and does not usurp the throne. This is a matter of importance, because H is merely an account of the adventures of the Fox and the Ape in various disguises, ending with the most important adventure of all, the seizure of the Lion's throne. It is true that in D the Lion is the king of beasts, but this is a matter of no significance, because he is not characterized, and because such a situation is a mere commonplace in fable literature. Again, in D the hero has no companion, and his adventures do not bear the least relation to those of the Fox in H.

6. The deception is discovered, in D, by chance; in H, classical mythology is involved. The punishment of the Mule is death; the Fox gets off scot free. This last point is significant, because Spenser tells us of the long search for the guilty Fox, of his capture, of the summoning of the parliament

To heare their doome, and sad ensample see.

But

The Foxe, first Author of that treacherie,  
He did uncase, and then away let flie.

This is obviously an illogical procedure; no suggestion of a reason can be found in D, but must be searched for elsewhere.

Thus it appears that in no respect is there anything but the most casual relation between D and H. Even the passage on the delays at court is, in D, not intended as a satire, but as an exhortation to the mule to practice the virtue of patience. It is quite true that Spenser may have been so struck with the passage that he hit upon the plan of using it from a different viewpoint; but is this probable when one reflects that satirical accounts of "suitor's delays" can be found elsewhere, and were very common in that time? Moreover, did not Spenser's own life suggest such an incident in his poem, and had he need of any other source? Even if there is some relationship between D and H at this point, the wide divergence between the two in characterization, in incident, in plan and purpose of work, together with the fact that most of the points upon which Mr. Grosart lays stress can be paralleled in *Æsopian* fables, and formed commonplaces of the animal stories of the time, precludes the possibility of accepting D as in any true sense the source of H.

### III.

In looking about for a possible source, one must take into consideration the difference between the literary standards of the sixteenth century and those of, say, the fourteenth. In the earlier period, the author was supposed to follow his original very closely. If he possessed no marked genius, there were few differences; if the author had literary power, his version would show greater skill in characterization and in selection of incidents for emphasis. In dealing with a poet like Spenser, however, one must not expect to find any such slavish following of a source; one must be content if the general relationship of the poem to the hypothetical source can be demonstrated. If, in addition, the author can be proved to betray his knowledge of an earlier work upon a similar subject by some details carelessly or unconsciously copied, the case must be considered clear. And in such a tale as H, which belongs to that great category of animal stories which includes not only D, but the *Æsopian* fables and many others, one must also consider whether the relationship is not so vague as to make it impossible to place one's finger upon some single



work and say that here we have the source of the tale. Manifestly, H is a fourteenth-century work done in the sixteenth century. We shall expect, therefore, to find it in many respects a very original poem.

Before proceeding to compare H with other poems upon a similar subject, it is necessary to analyze the structure of the work. The story is as follows: (a) A dreadful plague is raging, and the narrator is stricken. To cheer him, some friends sit with him and each tells a story:

Some tolde of Ladies, and their Paramoures;  
Some of brave Knights, and their renowned Squires;  
Some of the Faeries and their strange attires;  
And some of Giaunts, hard to be beleived.

Among the friends was a good old woman hight Mother Hubbard, who, when it was her turn, related the story of the Fox and the Ape. (b) Being dissatisfied with their lot, the Fox and the Ape decide to go on a pilgrimage. (c) They first adopt the disguise of soldier (Ape) and his dog (Fox); they meet a farmer and hire out to him, being set in charge of a flock of sheep; these they destroy during the course of a year, and flee in order to escape detection. (d) Taking to the road once more, they meet a priest, who is an ignorant time-server; by this fellow they are advised to enter the service of the church. Accordingly, the Fox secures a place as priest, while the Ape is made his parish-clerk. Their life in this capacity becomes such a scandal that once more they are forced to flee, and in their wanderings they meet a gaily decked Mule, who tells them of the delights of court life. (e) The result is that the Ape clothes himself like a gentleman, and, taking the Fox with him as his body-servant, goes to court. Here they prosper for a time, chiefly through the manifold tricks of the Fox, but at last are discovered and banished. (f) While wandering through the forest, they find the Lion, king of beasts, asleep. At the suggestion of the Fox, they seize the scepter and crown, and, after a hot debate as to which shall be king, the Ape takes the signs of authority, though he pledges himself to be ruled in all things by the Fox. They are received with respect by the beasts and carry things with a high hand until Jove

interferes and sends Mercury to awaken the Lion. (g) The true king returns, and the traitors flee. After a long pursuit both are captured and are brought back to court, where they are tried and pronounced guilty. The Fox escapes, strangely enough, with no punishment, but the Ape's ears and tail are cropped.

#### IV.

a) We are now ready to discuss the seven divisions, or incidents, into which the poem naturally falls. In the first place, the character of the introduction makes it plain that Spenser had in mind one or more of the great collections of tales grouped within a certain framework so common in mediæval literature. Examples of such collections are the *Seven Wise Masters*, in which various unrelated tales are told in order to convince the king that he should, or should not, put his son to death; the *Canterbury Tales*, in which a similar use is made of an imaginary pilgrimage to a famous shrine; and the *Decamerone* of Boccaccio, in which the tales serve to relieve the tedium of exile during a plague. Of the three, the last is manifestly very similar to the poem which we are considering, with the exception that in H all the tales save one are read by title only. It is possible that the raging of the pestilence in England during the latter part of the sixteenth century put Spenser in mind of Boccaccio's great work, and that he determined to try his hand at a similar compilation.<sup>1</sup> In such a compilation, tales of ladies and their paramours, of brave knights and their renowned squires, would play an important part. For some reason, however, Spenser has worked out, or preserved, but one tale in his series; but the character of the introduction is such as to make it clear that he had in mind some such work as the *Decamerone*. The situation portrayed in the introduction is far more like Boccaccio than like Chaucer.

It is now time to call attention to the remarkable parallel

<sup>1</sup>For many years the plague raged steadily in and about London, with terrific outbursts from time to time. According to the records, these special outbursts came in 1563, when no one from London was permitted to enter Windsor on pain of death: in 1568-69; in 1573-74, when people were forbidden to go to plays; and in 1578. After the great plague of 1578, however, there was no very serious outburst of the pest until 1592-93. (For these and other facts concerning this matter, cf. CREIGHTON's *History of Epidemics in Britain*, pp. 309-351.) Incidentally these facts seem to corroborate the view that H must have been written about 1578.

afforded by the famous mediæval romance of *Renard the Fox*. In spite of Professor Lounsbury's scepticism regarding sources of animal tales, to which reference has already been made, the correspondences between this romance and H are too numerous and too significant to permit one to doubt that some relation exists between the two works. A few general points will first be noted.

1. Spenser need not have depended upon French or Dutch versions of the *Renard* romance (R), since at least two English versions had been printed prior to his time. The first of these issued from Caxton's press in 1481;<sup>1</sup> the second was printed in London by Thomas Gualtier in 1550. That in England, as elsewhere, the story of *Renard* was considered to present a picture of court life, is shown by the title or Incipit of the edition of 1550, which reads:

Here beginneth the booke of Raynarde the Foxe, conteining divers goodlye hystories and parables, with other dyvers pointes necessarye for al men to be marked, by the which pointes, men maye lerne to come unto the subtyll knowledge of suche things as daly ben used and had, in the counceyles of lordes and prelates, both ghostely and worldely, and also among marchauntes and comen people.<sup>2</sup>

It may not be superfluous to remark that a work which excited the admiration of such moderns as Goethe, Herder, Carlyle, and many others, and which in the mediæval period supplied material for the illustrations of splendid manuscripts, the decorations of tapestries, church stalls, missals, and the like, may not improbably have appealed to the youthful Spenser.<sup>3</sup>

2. Both R and H are allegories in which, under the form of animal epic, real life is portrayed, usually with satirical intent. It has already been noted that satire is not characteristic of D. In R we are told that those who read "shal nowe understand and fele the forsayd subtyl deceytes that dayly ben used in the worlde."

<sup>1</sup> Edited by W. J. THOMS for the Percy Society, 1844.

<sup>2</sup> THOMS, *op. cit.*, p. lxxix. Caxton's first sentence is very similar.

<sup>3</sup> A number of instances of the popularity of R as proved by inscriptions and sculptures might be cited. In a cathedral at Strasburg, for example, is a sculpture which represents *Renard* "étendu sur un brancard, porté en procession funèbre par les autres bêtes," MARTIN, *Roman de Renart*, Vol. III, p. 88.

3. In both R and H the Fox is the hero. In H, the Ape is the follower; he never takes the initiative. It may also be observed that in D there is no enmity between the Fox and the Lion. This enmity is common to R and H, and is one of the marked characteristics of R even in the earliest times.<sup>1</sup>

4. In both R and H there is genuine characterization. The Lion is in fact king of beasts; in D he is so only in name. The Fox is the same in H as in R—crafty, hated, forced often to flee; plots often against the Lion; is a great liar and flatterer.

5. The disguises assumed by the Fox in H are found also in R. The same is true of the incidents, as will be shown later.

6. The Fox and the Ape are intimately and repeatedly connected in both R and H. This is not true of D.

We are now ready to examine the incidents in H in greater detail.

b) The Fox as Pilgrim. This is one of the most common situations in the different versions of R. Sometimes the Fox is styled a *pèlerin*; sometimes a pilgrimage is the subject of a tale. Moreover, the Fox and the Ape are often associated on the friendliest terms, though the Fox is generally on bad terms with the other animals. One notable instance in Caxton's version<sup>2</sup> is as follows: The Fox has been summoned to court to answer for his misdeeds. On the way he meets Mertynne the Ape, who addresses him:

Dere cosyn me thynketh ye ar not wel wyth yourself; what eyleth yow? Who hath dysplesyth yow? Thyngs that thoucheth charge ought to be gyven in knowleche to frendis. A triew frende is a grete helpe. He fyndeth ofte better counseyle than he that the charge resteth on.

The Fox tells his trouble, and the Ape at first advises him to go boldly to court and defend himself. This the Fox cannot do, for he has been excommunicated; whereupon the Ape volunteers to go to Rome to get absolution for him. Before this the Fox had made elaborate preparations to go on a pilgrimage to Rome; now he turns the matter over to his friend, who boasts his power in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. THOMS, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii. Grimm's collection of Latin poems of the tenth and eleventh centuries contains one of this type; Wright cites another. Of course the great *Roman de Renart*, of the thirteenth century, illustrates the statement.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. THOMS, pp. 92 ff.

spiritual matters and threatens to "curse" any who harm the Fox, so that for fear of the Fox and the Ape none dare do any harm to the Fox. The close parallel between this situation and that at the beginning of *H* will not escape one. The constant tendency to dwell upon the friendship between the Fox and members of the Ape family is further illustrated by the fact that it is Rukenawe, the She-ape, who eloquently defends Renard, to the surprise of the king, who never before heard aught but ill about the Fox. The fox and the lion, the fox and the wolf, are traditional enemies; the fox and the ape are traditional friends. Thus Spenser, consciously or unconsciously, is in complete accord with the spirit of the tales about Renard, when he makes the fox and the ape friends and companions throughout his story.

c) For the incident of the soldier no good parallel is to be found in *Caxton*. In the French versions Renard often figures as a soldier. As to the dishonest shepherd, it is characteristic of Renard to kill other animals and then by his craft to escape punishment. The different branches of the cycle are full of incidents of this type; the animals are perpetually charging Renard with making way with some of their number.

d) The Corrupt Priest and his Clerk. No incident is more characteristic of the cycle than this. Not only are the instances very numerous in which the story is used to veil an attack upon the corrupt clergy, but this characteristic was so well known that mediæval sculpture often reflects it, while spectacles were devised after the fashion of the Boy Bishop to represent the satire. Branch XVII of the French romance is especially bold.<sup>1</sup> Vigils, masses, etc., are chanted in bad Latin, and Renard's confession, prayers, sermon, etc., are filled with mockery. Martin tells of the use of Renard material for satirizing the clergy in 1300. He says:

Philippe le Bel la fit jouer dans les rues de Paris pour se moquer du pape Boniface VIII. Un homme vêtu de la peau d'un renard mettait par dessus un surplis et chantait l'épître comme un simple clerc. Il paraissait ensuite avec une mitre et enfin avec la tiare, courant après foules et poussins, les croquant et les mangeant.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MARTIN, *Roman de Renart*, Vol. III.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 88.

In the various branches of the cycle the Fox frequently mocks the priests, or, on occasion, adopts the disguise of a priest. In Caxton's version, when the rascal confesses, he says that he tries to be good, but

thenne fynde I in my waye so many stones, and the fotespores that thyse loos prelates and riche preestys goo in, that I am anone taken agayn. . . . I here there synge, pype, lawhe, playe, and alle mirthe, and I here that these prelates, and riche curates, preche and saye al other wyse, then they thynke and doo. There learne I to lye.<sup>1</sup>

Again, when the Cock complains of the wrongs received at Renard's hands, he says:

Atte laste cam he in lyknes of an heremyte, and brought to me a lettre for to rede, sealed wyth the kynges seal, in whyche stode wretoun, that the kynge had made pees over al in his royaume, and that alle maner beestis and fowles shold doo none harme ner scathe to any other; yet, sayd he to me more, that he was a cloysterer, or a closyd recluse becomen, and that he wolde receyve grete penance for his synnes, he shewd me his slavyne, and pylche, and an heren sherte ther under.<sup>2</sup>

Even more interesting, because of the similarity to the situation in H, is the account in the French romance of how Renard and Tybert hear mass.<sup>3</sup> Tybert meets a priest and has fun with him; he examines him on Latin, then runs off with his books and horse. After adopting the priest's disguise, he meets Renard on the way and announces that he must go to the monastery and say mass, expressing regret that he has no clerk for the responses. Renard eagerly offers to go; Tybert pretends not to know him, but at last is convinced, and tells how he served the priest.

De gramaire li demandai,  
De soffime et de question,  
Ne me sot respondre un boton.

When they reach the monastery,

Les lampes furent alumees  
Et lez genz s'en furent alees,  
Ce dit Renart 'or comencez!  
Par deu, trop vos estez targiez;  
Sanz vespres oïr s'en vont tuit.'

<sup>1</sup> THOMS, pp. 86, 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Branch XII (ed. MARTIN) ll. 485 ff.

Tybert puts on the surplice and goes to the altar, but reads matins instead of vespers, until Renard sets him right. They read the service, giving the psalms

Molt haument a deus envers.

They omit nothing :

Tot mot a mot et tot a ligne,

even giving the Magnificat; while Renard pronounces the benediction. All is told very delightfully, quite in the manner of a Feast of Fools, or a celebration in honor of a Boy Bishop.<sup>1</sup>

In another place we have an incident even more like that of H.<sup>2</sup> Renard enters a monastery and for a time lives an exemplary life :

Les signes fet del moinage,  
Molt le tienent li moine a sage  
Cher est tenuz et molt amez.  
Or est frere Renart clames,  
Molt est Renart de bel service,  
Volentiers vet a seinte église.

But this unwonted piety is too much for him, and he steals four capons. The friars at last find him out, and he is promptly expelled.<sup>3</sup>

Neither of the incidents last mentioned is found in Caxton's version, but there are frequent references to the mock repentance of Renard and to his preparations to go on a religious pilgrimage. Reference has already been made to the interview between the arch-rogue and Martin the ape. Renard says of him that he is "wyser in clergie than somme preest; he hath ben advocate for the bysshop of Earmeryk ix yer duryng."<sup>4</sup> The ape offers to go

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the two rogues quarrel at last, reminding one of H.

<sup>2</sup> Branch VI, ll. 1439 ff. (MARTIN, Vol. I, pp. 237 ff.).

<sup>3</sup> Sudre thinks that the source of this type of incident is the wolf as priest found in Latin poems (*Les Sources du Roman de Renart*, pp. 220, 221). He cites many examples, among them two lines from Alexander Neckam,

Non tonsura juvat, juvat aut amplissima vestis;  
Si lupus es, quamvis esse videris ovis.

The ultimate source Sudre finds in the New Testament. He also thinks (pp. 34, 35) that these satires on the clergy are a late development. Martin is the false priest, in whom is mocked the ignorance and greed of the priests. Thus the Fox and the Ape stand, in R, as the personifications of the corruption in the church. This is precisely what they stand for in H.

<sup>4</sup> THOMS, pp. 92 ff.

to Rome to get absolution for Renard, saying that since he is the bishop's clerk he knows the way well and has many friends; he boasts his power with the "cardynal of Puregold," who rules the pope, and whose concubine is a relative of the Ape; he tells Renard to notify the king that if anyone harms his friend he will "curse" the guilty person. So for fear of the Fox and the Ape none dare do any harm to the Fox.

Surely it is not necessary to dwell further upon this matter. In any version of the romance which came to his hand Spenser found abundant suggestion for representing the Fox as a false priest or hypocritical penitent, while suggestions that he was aided in his rôle by a companion such as Tybert or Martin are equally common. In D there are no such situations: an added reason for holding that R and not D supplied the material which suggested the most important incident, save one, in H.

e) We now approach the only incident which finds even a remote parallel in D. How slight is this relation between the satire on court life, as found in H, and the passage in which the Mule, in D, is urged to be patient amidst the delays and disappointments of the court, has already been shown. It remains to show that in R we have not only all that D affords, but that it is coupled with a fierce satire wholly wanting in North's translation.

In the famous passage (ll. 750-850) in which Spenser treats of the knavery of Reynold<sup>1</sup> and the Ape at court, one notes: (1) that the Fox assumes different shapes at will, the better to befool his victims; (2) that emphasis is placed upon the lying and hypocrisy of the court; (3) that there are "passionate words of suitor's delays;" (4) that none are said to thrive at court except such as practice Reynold's craft. Of these, the first is so common in R as to require no special treatment. Renard is continually assuming some disguise in order to play a trick or to commit a crime. As to the second and third, a few passages drawn from Caxton's version may be cited:

To God mote it be complayned how that these false lyars and flaterers now a dayes in the lordes courtes ben moste herde and belevyd, the

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Spenser several times uses the name "Reynold" for the Fox. This is of course an adaptation of "Renard."



shrewes and false deceyvers ben borne up for to doo to good men alle the harme and scath they maye.<sup>1</sup>

And again :

The lesynges ben moste used in the lordes courtes, certaynly lordes, ladyes, prestes, and clerkes, maken most lesynges. Men dar not telle to the lordes now the trouthe.<sup>2</sup>

The fox expounds the principles on which he governs his life by saying that it is necessary to lie and cheat in order to succeed. Can he that subtylte in suche wise that he stamer not in his wordes, and may thenne be herrde, this man may doo wonder ; he may were skarlet and gryse : he wynneth in the spyrituel lawe and temporal also, and wheresommever he hath to doo.

Many liars are awkward and are found out,

but who can gyve to his lesynge a conclusion, and prononce it without tatelyng, like as it were wretton tofore hym, and that he can so blynde the peple that his lesyng shall better be bileued than the trouthe, that is the man.

And again :

Men must jape, bourde, and lye, in smale thynges, for who sayth alway trouthe, he may now goo nowher thurgh the world.<sup>3</sup>

To all this Grinbert, to whom the fox has been confessing, says, What need have ye to shryve you? Ye shoulde *yourself by right be the preest*, and lete me, and other sheep come to you for to be shryven. Ye knowe the state of the world, in suche wyse as no man may halte tofore you.<sup>4</sup>

This note prevails throughout the last half of the work. By his tricks the fox wins the highest favor at court and is next to the king in power. Thus the situation is very similar to that in H, where for a time the two fellow-conspirators prosper to their hearts' content.

The fourth point, that none prosper at court save such as practice Reynold's craft, follows in H hard upon the situation last described. Spenser bitterly exclaims:

None but such as this bold ape, unblest,  
Can ever thrive in that unlucky quest :  
*Or such as hath a Reynold to his man.*

<sup>1</sup> THOMS, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 87, 88.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 88, 89.

This is very similar to the passage in R in which we are told by the author that any who can lie and flatter as the fox does will have great power with lords spiritual and temporal.

There ben many, and also the moste part that crepe after his waye and his hole. . . . *Who that will not use Reynardis crafte* now, is nought worth in the world now in ony estate that is of myght. But yf one can crepe in Reynard's nette, and hath ben his scoler, thenne may ye dwelle with us. For thenne knoweth he wel the way how he may aryse, and is sette up above of every man. Ther is in the world muche seed left of the foxe, whiche he now oueral groweth and cometh sore up; though they have no rede berdes, yet ther ben founden mo foxes now than ever were here to fore. The rightwyse people ben al loste, trouthe and rightwysnes ben exyled, and fordriven, and for them ben abyden wyth us covetyse, falshede, hate, and envye. Thyse regne now moche in every courte, for is it in the popes court, the emperours, the kynges, dukes, or ony other lordes where some euer it be, eche man laboureth to put other out fro his worship, offyce, and power, for to make hymself to clymme hye with lyes, wyth flateryng, wyth symonye, with money, or wyth strengthe and force. Ther is none thyng byloued ne knowen in the court now a days but money; the money is better byloued than God, for men doo muche more therfore. . . . Now clerkes goon to Rome, to Parys, and to many another place, for to lerne Reynardis crafte. Is he clerke, is he layeman, everiche of them tredeth in the foxes path, and seketh his hole. The world is of suche a condycion now, that every man seketh himself in alle matters. I wote not what ende shal come to us herof. All wyse men may sorowe wel herfore. I fere that for the grete falsnes, thefte, robberye, and murdre, that is now used so moche and comonly . . . that God will take vengeance.<sup>1</sup>

To sum up the discussion of incident *e*), we may note that in both R and H (1), the fox is the type of the crafty courtier; (2) he is said to represent perfectly the life of the court, in which those only are successful who practice Renard's craft; (3) for a time he succeeds, but at last the other animals turn against him and he is overthrown; (4) the author expresses with bitter contempt his opinion of the life of the time. It may be objected that in R there is not so definite a reference to a suitor's delays as in D, but to this it may be answered: (1) that the passage in D is not satire, but is an exhortation to patience; (2) that the true source of the wonderful lines in H is Spenser's own bitter experi-

<sup>1</sup> THOMS, pp. 164, 165.

ence and that he needed no model or other suggestion for such a passage; (3) that the characters, the tricks, the incidents, and even references to Renardie as the chief practice of the court are common to H and R but are not in D, where an entirely different set of characters and incidents is introduced; (4) that the *spirit* of H is found in R, but is wholly wanting in D.

f) The Usurpation of the Throne. Caxton has nothing similar to the closing scene of H, in which the two conspirators seize the throne and for a time rule in the Lion's stead. In all the MSS of the French *roman*, however, there is a story of how Renard by a trick possessed himself of the Lion's throne. This poem, which forms Branch XI of the *roman*, is undoubtedly of much later origin than the other branches, and was written in order to bring the story to an end of some sort.<sup>1</sup> The poem is purely chivalric, and, as Martin has pointed out, abounds in phrases found in the *chansons*. Many of the heroes die, a chivalric characteristic not found in the true animal epic. The poem consists of two parts, the first telling of the trick by which Renard secured the throne, and the second relating the manner in which he used his power. The trick is not the same as in H, but the manner of rule is strikingly similar in the two poems. As Sudre remarks, the Fox as king in the French poem shows himself "accommodant avec les grands, dur et unpitoyable avec les petits;" while Spenser's reference to the need for one who hopes for preferment to practice the arts of Reynold, already referred to, finds a close parallel in the bitter words of the unknown French writer:

Nus ne puet, ce poise mi,  
Au jour d'ui venir a maistrie  
Se il ne set de renardie.<sup>2</sup>

A brief summary of the *Couronnement de Renart* may now be given. Just after killing Tardif, Renard is met by a messenger

<sup>1</sup>Cf. MARTIN, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 68. The situation is similar to that of the O.F. *Perceval*, in which several continuations of Chrétien's story were made in an effort to get a conclusion.

<sup>2</sup>*Les Sources*, etc., p. 36. Sudre concludes his remarks with the statement that from beginning to end the poet seeks to show, "qu'ici-bas seuls triomphent l'orgueil, la médisance et la fausseté dont son héros est la plus parfaite incarnation." This is precisely the thing which the corresponding incident in H so successfully accomplishes.

who says that Noble the lion needs him at once. On the way, the Fox meets Grinbert, whom he takes with him as a page.

"Venes sor cest cheval monter  
Si iron moi i vos a cort"  
Lors ne fu mie Grinbert sort.  
Quant Grinbert ot commandement,  
Si est montes isnelement.  
Que il ne volt plus delaier:  
Or a Renart bon escuier.<sup>1</sup>

Thus in the French, as in the English poem, the Fox is not alone; in the later scenes, though Grinbert is not the nominal king, he renders valuable service.

When they reach court they are told that the heathen have invaded the land; Renard counsels that the people be summoned; letters are sent out, and the animals, who have lost every animal characteristic, come forthwith. The king looks on from the window, with great pride. They miss Tardif, but Renard escapes embarrassment by someone's suggestion that the need is too great to wait for news of one reported dead. The process of arming and the departure are told in the conventional chivalric form; the queen is left in Renard's charge, who is nothing loth, for he has long loved her. In the absence of Noble and his companions, Renard takes steps to make himself king. He employs a messenger to ride at great speed, and as if from a great distance, announcing the king's death and saying that Renard had been named his successor and that Noble wished him to marry the queen. Renard feigns grief, a grief so great that he strikes dead the sergeant who brings such evil tidings. The supposed commands of Noble are obeyed to the letter; Grinbert and Tybert are chiefs at court; the poor are oppressed, and the castle strongly fortified. At length Noble, having carried his campaign to a successful issue, returns to his capital. After recovering from his surprise, he gives battle. This is described in the conventional manner of the *chanson de geste*, results in the death of many of the animal-knights, and at length is ended by a personal combat between Renard and Noble in which the Lion is victor.

<sup>1</sup> LL. 1686 ff. The poem is in MARTIN, Vol. I, pp. 436 ff.; MEON, Branch XI, ll. 1662 ff.

The Fox makes a characteristic plea for his life on the ground of previous services, and is forgiven.<sup>1</sup>

Not all the incidents in the *Couronnement* correspond to those in H, but the general situation is the same. In H it is the Ape who is king, but he is king only in name, for after the quarrel over the sovereignty, the Fox proposes to give the Ape the scepter only on condition

That ye ruled bee  
In all affaires, and counselled by mee.<sup>2</sup>

The fox is at the bottom of all the villainy:

Nought suffered he the Ape to give or graunt.

Thus the idea that the Fox, by fraud, becomes king in place of the Lion, is common to both. Again, it may be noted that emphasis is laid in both poems upon the strong guard by means of which the rascals hoped to resist the inevitable discovery of their crime. The outrageous character of the rule, also, is common to both, as well as the purely anthropomorphic character of the accounts. Finally it may be mentioned that though of late origin, the *Couronnement* is found in all the French MSS, and therefore very probably, on account of its great popularity, may have come under Spenser's eye. He alters the story to suit himself; the idea of it, with some of the chief characteristics, he seems to have drawn from R.

g) The Punishment. It remains only to discuss the punishment meted out to this arch-rogue. A characteristic of the animal epic, as Martin remarks, is that the heroes do not die; they represent types of the species, and, like them, are immortal.<sup>3</sup> In the *Couronnement*, the late origin is proved by the fact that nearly all the heroes are killed in battle. Yet even here, Renard, the arch-traitor, escapes. This is characteristic of all the branches; Renard is perpetually committing crimes, is perpetually caught red-handed, convicted, and as regularly pardoned. All this helps

<sup>1</sup> For arguments that Branch XI does not form any part of the original cycle, but is of learned origin, cf. G. PARIS, in *Journal des Savants*, 1895, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> As to this quarrel, it may be remarked that stories of such disputes among animals are not uncommon. One example may be cited: when Tybert and Renard say mass together they quarrel vigorously at last (Branch XII, ll. 485 ff.).

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 68.

to explain what would otherwise be a surprising close for Spenser's poem. If he had been writing independently of any source, the natural climax would have been the execution of Renard. In view of Spenser's tendency to moralize, it is the more surprising that, after describing in detail the careful search made for the culprit, after telling how a great court of the beasts was assembled and how they all declared the Fox guilty, the poet says:

The Foxe, first Author of that treacherie,  
He did uncase, and then away let flie.

This is precisely the situation that is repeatedly met with in R. The guilt is fixed on Renard; a great conclave of the beasts is summoned; the prisoner is solemnly pronounced worthy of death; with no apparent reason he is set free. Spenser does not explain why he ends his story in a manner different from what we should expect; he is, consciously or unconsciously, following the model set by R, and thus giving additional proof that for the source of H we must look not to D but to R.<sup>1</sup>

## V.

Thus it is reasonable to suppose that in writing H Spenser was influenced by two works. The prologue of the plague and of the stories told to beguile the time was probably suggested by the *Decamerone*, while the general plan of the story—the romance of the Fox and the Ape—is due to the Renard cycle. At least one version of this we know to have been popular in England in Spenser's time, and there can be no doubt that copies of French and Dutch versions must have circulated freely either in printed form or in MSS. Proof of the influence of this cycle is to be found, (1) in the fact that many of the incidents in H are duplicates of adventures narrated in R; (2) in the purpose of H,

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the instance just cited of Renard's escape from punishment is not the only case in R. He is repeatedly accused, convicted, and for no apparent reason let off. Caxton, as well as the French versions, supplies examples. It is of one of these that SUDRE remarks (*Les Sources*, etc., p. 35): "La branche du Jugement n'est d'un bout à l'autre qu'une douce moquerie à l'adresse des rois impuissants et des courtisans hypocrites. Ce tableau de Renart revenu à la cour, se plaignant de ce que des envieux ont mis à profit son absence pour le desservir, les insultes de tous ses ennemis, de l'âne lui-même pleurant de toutes parts sur lui au moment où il est lié au pied du gibet, son faux repentir, son départ comme croisé pour les Lieux Saints, ses insultes du haut d'une crête à toute la cour, à Noble, à la tête duquel il jette son écharpe et sa croix: voilà tout un côté de la société humaine peint avec la plus aimable ironie et une légèreté de touche admirable."

which, like R, presents a satirical view of the life of the time, while D is a book designed for the instruction of princes and is in no sense a satire on the times; (3) in the close parallel in characterization, the Fox and the Ape being friends and companions in both works, while the Fox, in both R and H, is extremely impudent, scorning the Ape and the other animals for obtuseness and cowardice, and priding himself upon his own cleverness; (4) in the unity of characterization and plot, a point not found in D; (5) in such parallels, besides those of incident, as the references to "Renard's craft" as the only sure means of getting on in the world; (6) in the exact correspondence of the two works in what may be called "atmosphere."

The debt of Spenser to his source is the suggestion to a bright mind of the usefulness of the Renard material as a means of satirizing the life of the time. The poet is too great and too original to follow slavishly his source after the manner of the mediæval romancers, but his debt is none the less clear. He has written, in fact, a new branch for the Renard cycle. Like earlier writers who did the same thing, he has used the old incidents in new combinations. The Fox is the hero from beginning to end; the Ape is always secondary. The method is the method of each branch of R: the Fox behaves outrageously, is found out, escapes; this being repeated over and over. Thus the true significance of H consists, not in its real or imaginary imitation of a great English poet of the fourteenth century, but in the fact that it gives us in condensed form a spirited sixteenth-century version of one of the finest of mediæval story-cycles.

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